

## Alternative 2: Enhanced Local and State Management

As in Alternative 1, the NPS would take no action in the study area beyond those actions already authorized (e.g. recreation grant programs, historic preservation programs, the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program). Alternative 2 provides a menu of programs and tools that could be pursued by the local community, the county and the state to accomplish the goals established for the alternatives. If fully implemented, Alternative 2 could protect the nationally significant resources of the Gaviota Coast by providing additional incentives for private land conservation, funds for public and private acquisition of land and conservation easements, and public access to the coast. By enhancing the ongoing efforts with actions such as these, the resources of the Gaviota Coast could be protected for the benefit of future generations.

Not all of the actions under Alternative 2 may be possible or practical in the near term. Some actions may be able to be implemented quickly, others may take longer, and the community may choose not to implement certain elements. Current economic conditions limit the potential in the near term for increased local, state and federal funding for conservation and recreation. Some initiatives may not be financially feasible in the near term, while others may require more creative approaches to funding.



*above: Pt. Conception lighthouse, Troy Rentz*

*top right: coastal trail at Ellwood, NPS photo*

*bottom right: Vandenberg Air Force Base, NPS photo*

**Private land stewardship.** Under Alternative 2, private landowners would be able to take additional individual and cooperative action to protect the resources on and around their land. More funding would be available for easements under Alternative 2, offering landowners more opportunities to keep agricultural land viable thereby protecting open space and resource values. Landowners and other stakeholders in the various watersheds along the Gaviota Coast could establish watershed partnerships and work cooperatively to develop and implement watershed protection measures that protect significant resources without impacting agricultural activities.

**Non-Profit conservation activities.** Non-profit organizations could develop new programs and pursue new funding sources and programs in order to enhance their resource conservation capabilities. A non-profit land trust, resource conservation district, or governmental entity (such as an open space district) could establish a revolving loan fund to purchase significant lands, place protective easements on those properties, and resell them to replenish the revolving fund. Sources of start-up funding could include state or federal appropriations, bond acts, Coastal Resource Enhancement Funds, or private donations.



**Agricultural land conservation.** Under Alternative 2, additional measures could be taken to support agricultural land conservation and to enhance the viability of the area's farming and ranching operations. The county and agricultural interests could work with the state Department of Conservation to seek changes in the Farmland Security Zone legislation to allow grazing land to be eligible for the 20 year Farmland Security Zone contracts. The upcoming county review of its agricultural preserve (Williamson Act) program could focus not only on this program's limits on land development, but also on keeping this program an attractive and viable program for active farmers and ranchers. The county, landowners and open space advocates could work with the state Department of Conservation to seek changes in the agricultural preserve legislation to enable the creation of open space preserves, with contracts and incentives similar to those in the agricultural preserve (Williamson Act) program.

**Regulatory and Incentive Programs (local, state, federal).** Under Alternative 2, the County Board of Supervisors and the voters could strengthen certain regulatory programs and develop new programs to support resource conservation along the Gaviota Coast. Santa Barbara County could place an initiative for strengthened existing agricultural, open space, rural or rural residential zoning by requiring voter approval to rezone such lands for development or urban use. The County Board of Supervisors could tighten provisions for conditional use permits to ensure that major facilities that are not in character with the rural setting (for example golf courses and large commercial facilities) are not allowed. The county could use the process of updating the coastal plan to engage the Gaviota Coast area stakeholders in a collaborative process to find an appropriate balance among public access, habitat protection, agricultural operations, scenic resources, and coastal-dependent industry and commerce.

Santa Barbara County could develop a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program and use Installment Purchase Agreements (IPA's) to provide additional funding and flexibility for easement acquisition. Under a PDR program, a local government agency can set funds aside to purchase easements from landowners, using funding programs such as the California Farmland Conservancy Program. IPA's allow easements to be purchased on a payment plan over a period of 20-30 years.

A regional open space district could be established to provide an additional funding source for acquiring land and conservation easements in the Gaviota Coast area. The county could establish a transfer of development rights (TDR) program, a local, incentive-based program that encourages land conservation by allowing landowners to sell or transfer the right to develop a parcel of land to a different parcel of land in another location.



sea otter, USFWS photo



Refugio State Beach, NPS photo



Establishment of Marine Life Protection Areas could protect the most critical nearshore marine resources of the Gaviota Coast, including reefs and kelp beds, estuaries, the temperature transition zones and upwellings of the Point Conception area, and shipwrecks and other submerged archeological resources. The California Department of Fish and Game is engaged in a planning process to consider the establishment of a network of Marine Life Protection Areas. Several concepts for marine protected areas on the Gaviota Coast have been developed as a result of this process.

Local government or non-profit organizations could request planning assistance from the NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA). The RTCA program works with community groups and local and state governments to restore rivers, preserve open space and develop trails and greenways. Upon request, RTCA staff can contribute expertise in facilitation, public outreach, resource assessment, and coordination to local resource planning efforts.

**Public Land Management and Access.** Under Alternative 2 existing public land management agencies could enhance and expand their capacity for resource protection and public access. The potential for new organizations and funding sources could also be explored. The local community could petition the state legislature to charter and fund a state land conservancy or a regional open space district to bring additional state funds to the Gaviota Coast for land protection, management, and program coordination. Such an entity could acquire and manage land, or simply serve as a funding mechanism for the land acquisition, easement acquisition, and land management activities of other public and private organizations.

Measures could be taken to strengthen protection of cultural and archeological resources. Additional inventories, documentation and mapping of cultural sites could be undertaken both on public lands and on the land of willing private landowners. Designation on the National Register of Historic Places would help to document and publicize the historical and archeological significance of the area, and could enhance funding and technical assistance opportunities. Chumash organizations such as the Coastal Band of Chumash Nations, Barbareño Chumash Council and the federally recognized Santa Ynez Band of Chumash use ceremonial sites within the study area. These organizations and others

could continue to work with landowners and managers to protect sacred sites and archeological resources, and to obtain access or ownership of important sites for ceremonial, interpretive, and educational purposes.

The county could work to create connector trails from the coastal trail up the canyons to significant viewpoints or to the Los Padres National Forest in several locations. Trail planning and development should be done in cooperation and consultation with landowners and should avoid areas where privacy and agricultural operations would be negatively impacted. A state land conservancy or open space district could facilitate Santa Barbara County's efforts to dedicate additional resources to the planning and development of the coastal trail and complete high priority sections as quickly as possible. The state and county park systems could seek opportunities to acquire significant resource lands and to provide recreational and coastal access opportunities.

Enhanced federal agency involvement with surrounding communities could include the Los Padres National Forest working more closely with local landowners and organizations in cooperative land management and resource protection, educational and interpretive programs, and public access. The programs of the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail would be enhanced by additional open space and recreational areas, and completion of sections of the Coastal Trail.

**Vandenberg Air Force Base.** Under Alternative 2, Vandenberg AFB could work through partnerships with neighboring jurisdictions and non-profits to expand and enhance its public access and education programs. Vandenberg AFB could seek opportunities to increase public access to specific areas of the base in ways that don't threaten natural or cultural resources or the safety and security of the base. The county and Vandenberg AFB could work together to identify possible beach access areas to replace those that are closed for endangered species protection. They could also seek workable approaches to routing the California Coastal Trail through the base. Vandenberg AFB could work with non-profit conservation and education organizations to allow guided tours of the base in order to increase public appreciation and understanding of the base's natural resources, historic sites, and current missions.



## Part 2: Environmental Assessment

### BACKGROUND

The Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Gaviota Coast Feasibility Study has been prepared in order to identify and analyze the potential environmental and socioeconomic consequences of each of the alternatives considered in the feasibility study.

National Park Service Policies require that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) be prepared for a Special Resource Study rather than an EA when:

- (1) The resource being studied meets the criteria for inclusion in the National Park System (i.e. it is nationally significant and is deemed feasible and suitable for inclusion in the system)
- (2) One of the alternatives being considered is designation as a National Park System unit, even if that is ultimately not the recommendation of the Secretary (Director's Order #12 and Handbook).

The NPS initially planned to prepare an EA for this study, later pursuing an Environmental Impact Statement as controversy developed and NPS policy changed. Despite the earlier decision to complete an EIS, an EA has been prepared for this study because the area does not meet the criteria for inclusion in the National Park System and designation as a National Park System unit is not being considered.

**Impacts.** Impacts were assessed for mandatory topics required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); NPS Management Policies; concerns expressed by the public or other agencies during scoping; and the relevance to the study area and to the alternatives under consideration. Impacts were assessed using existing population and housing projections to the year 2030. Near term impacts are assumed to occur within the next ten years, while long term impacts would happen later, 10-30 years from now. Because the alternatives in the Feasibility Study are conceptual in nature, the analysis of environmental consequences in the EA is quite general.

### ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVES

The NPS is required to identify an "environmentally preferred alternative" in an EA. The "environmentally preferred alternative" is the alternative that best protects, preserves and enhances historic, cultural and natural resources, and that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment. Alternative 2 is considered the "environmentally preferred" alternative because it increases the local capacity for permanent land conservation, effective management of significant natural and cultural resources, and public understanding of the significance of the area. Additional details are spelled out in the goals analysis, below.

The "preferred alternative" is the agency-preferred course of action. The NPS is not required to identify a "preferred alternative" in an EA. The NPS does not have a "preferred alternative" at this time because the actions identified in each alternative are local, state and private actions, not NPS actions. The NPS will identify a "preferred alternative" after analyzing public and agency responses to the draft Feasibility Study.

### GOALS ANALYSIS

The following summary describes impacts as they relate to the goals established for the alternatives and the specific impact topics required by law and policy.

#### **Protect significant natural and cultural resources.**

Under Alternative 1, significant natural and cultural resources would continue to receive their current level of protection and management. In the near-term, existing laws and regulations would continue to protect natural resources from degradation on a project by project basis. Habitat enhancement and restoration efforts to protect specific species or ecosystems other than those by large public land managers would be individual without coordination. In the long term, increased pressure from population growth and rising land values near the Urban Rural Boundary Line could result in additional development which could have a cumulative, long term impact on significant natural resources. Alternative 2 could provide more opportunities for protecting natural resources through new funding programs, establishment of marine protected areas, and a coordinated watershed management effort for the south coast watersheds.



Under Alternative 1, significant archeological sites and historical resources on private land will likely be surveyed only when development projects are proposed or implemented. Development projects that are implemented will likely disturb, damage, or destroy these resources. Once destroyed, archeological sites and their potential contribution to scientific understanding cannot be replaced. Cultural sites and structures that are not already protected will likely continue to experience natural deterioration or may be destroyed. Conversion of ranch lands to more profitable land use could degrade the historic cultural landscape. Alternative 2 could provide more opportunities to preserve land in open space, thereby protecting the cultural landscape and preventing the disturbance of archeological and historical sites.

**Protect scenic resources.** Alternatives 1 and 2 would both protect scenic resources to some degree. Under Alternative 1, impacts on scenic resources would be addressed at the local level during planning review by the Santa Barbara County and the California Coastal Commission. Conversion of agricultural land to residential use under Alternative 1 would limit opportunities to secure better access to scenic resources and could over time have a cumulative adverse impact on scenic coastal resources. Implementation of Alternative 2 would offer more funding opportunities to permanently protect open space providing more opportunities for coastal access and protection of scenic resources.

**Maintain the viability of farms and ranches.** Under Alternative 1, rising agricultural land values and limited funding to protect agricultural land valued at high prices would likely lead to the conversion of some agricultural land to other uses. Alternative 2 would increase opportunities for keeping agricultural land in production by providing more funding sources for agricultural easements.



agriculture by Refugio Road, NPS photo

### **Continue local control and private land stewardship.**

Alternative 1 and 2 will both be implemented through local control and private land stewardship. Under Alternative 2, new organizations that could assist with protecting resource lands could be established based on goals set by the local community. Their funding programs would assist ongoing private land stewardship efforts. For example, an open space district can emphasize agricultural viability by providing more funding for easements or increase opportunities for recreation depending on the priorities set during its establishment.

### **Increase the capability and funding for protection of significant resources, agricultural lands, and opportunities for public enjoyment.**

Alternative 1 assumes that funding levels for protecting significant resources would remain constant or decrease if current economic conditions continue to impact programs. However, Alternative 2 offers several recommendations for increasing the capability and funding for protection of significant resources, agricultural lands, and opportunities for public enjoyment. As described in the environmental assessment, successful implementation of funding and open space programs such as an open space district or state land conservancy could result in thousands of acres of land that are permanently protected and increase opportunities for public enjoyment in the long term.

### **Reduce conflict between public access and private lands.**

Conflicts between public access and private lands can be reduced through education and providing increased recreational opportunities for the public that are sensitively sited and designed. No additional efforts to reduce such conflicts are expected under Alternative 1. Entities such as an open space district, recommended in Alternative 2, could provide more resources towards increasing recreational opportunities when land becomes available, as well as monitoring access near private lands and educating trail users in an effort to reduce conflicts.



coastal view, NPS photo

